

# The Athenian Mercury:

Tuesday, January 10. 1692. Licens'd, E. B.

Gentlemen,

St. James's,  
Jan. 4th.  
1692.

"I Have all your Volumes by me, being no Enemy to the Project, and not a little pleas'd at the infinite variety of Subjects, the different Cases, Passions, Humours, and Inclinations of your Querists. The considerable time your Papers have been continued seems to give me a lively prospect of Humanity, (Letters or Speeches being fainter Images of Souls;) for there's scarce any Station or Condition (perhaps multitudes of all) but what have drawn their own Portraiture, and committed it to your Volumes: So that whereas formerly there seem'd to be a vast difference, (I had almost said an *Antithesis*) betwixt reading *Men and Books*, there seems now to be a friendly Accommodation, and we may read both at once, at least more effectively than ever.

"I wish I could proceed, and say, your Performance was as exact, as the Subject is pleasant; not but that I and every body else will grant, that you have advanc'd many things worthy the Design, and your own Pretensions: But there are also many things which I'm not so well satisfied in, and how to extricate my self, or pay you that Justice I ought, if I find my self in an Error, I know not, unless you please to settle a *Correspondence* with me: the Conveniency of my retirement, the opportunity of a little Library, and a thoughtful Constitution, all turn Advocates in my behalf; and I'm willing to believe, they will not plead in vain, or at least fail of an Answer in convenient haste, which will Oblige

Your unknown humble Servant,

T. B.

SIR,

WE have no Directions here how to send to you, nor do you suggest any dislike of being answer'd thus publickly, so that being put to the choice of Silence, or the Course that we have here taken, we rather embrac'd the last, being unwilling to deprive our selves of the Happiness we expect in a *Correspondence* with you, which you seem to desire. We make no Scruple to confess, that our performance has not been so exact as we cou'd desire, that there may be many things which we cou'd wish alter'd; yet as we have not the Vanity to think we cou'd discover every single Error we have committed upon a second Review, so we are confident there are several Truths (and such as we dare defend) which some Persons may censure and condemn as Erroneous. As for such things as you profess your self dissatisfied in, we shall be very willing to receive your Objections, in order to remove that dissatisfaction we have been the Authors of, either by solving your doubts, or retracting the Errors of

Athens.

Quest. 1. I Have an Estate that is some part of it legally Tithe-free, concerning which I desire your Judgment, whether I may with a safe Conscience retain it, or ought to restore it to the Church?

Ans. This is such a rare Scruple, that had we not the Letter it self to produce by us, and the Gentleman who sent it, tho' to us unknown, to witness it,

some might take it only for a *made Question*, it being a much more common practice to gripe what's possible from the Church without any respect to Law, or Conscience, than to be concern'd for the unjust possession of any thing once dedicated to God; for which reason we have thought fit to look out, and put together several Questions which we found on the File, relating much to the same Argument. As for the present Case, we think the pinch will on a fair Examination lye here, Whether or no the *Quota pars*, or a precise tenth, allotted for the subsistence of the Clergy, be of Natural Right, and supposing it to be so, whether any Body of men, consisting of them, or their Representatives, have power to part with this Right, so as to deprive their Posterity of it, without a valuable Compensation to the Church in its room? For the first Question, by Mr. Seldens leave, who lov'd the Clergy just as much as he did Monarchy, and wou'd be often making ostentation of his Learning, and posing the poor Parsons, as Whitlock tells us in his *Memoirs*, we say by the leave of him, and all his Learning, we shall embrace the Affirmative for these Reasons. First, Some *Quota pars* seems necessary; for otherwise, if the Clergies maintenance be left *ad libitum*, 'twou'd leave it entirely, either in the Princes or Peoples power to starve 'em into Slavery, or Rebellion, when they have dedicated themselves to the Altar, and no other way of living: And why shou'd their Bread be left to the Caprice of any Man, any more than that of Lawyers, Tradesmen, or any other Body of men: — If they are for reducing all to Apostolical practice, let the Laity begin, and they'd soon find more than a tenth of their Estates at the dispose of the Clergy. Now if any *Quota*, what less than the least part, the tenth being the least natural number? Some constant Tribute is due from Man to God, for his Blessing on his Industry and Labour, and as a *Quit-rent* to the great Lord of the World. Now why are not the Clergy as proper persons to receive and order this, as they were before Christianity — But that they'll say was Legal, Ceremonial they mean, or else a Topical Law for Judea only: In answer, First, That some allowance, some part is of natural Right can't be deny'd, and who shou'd fix or determine that more equally than God Almighty? this he has done in the Case of the Jews, a Nation whom he chose out for Examples to all the World. Nor can we foresee any valuable Objection to be made against this, unless Christians are for dealing with their Clergy worse than Jews, that there were more Priests and Levites to maintain among the Jews, than proportionably there are of our Christian Clergy — In Answer, so far from it, that as the Jews Land was much less, for Example, than ours in England, containing in all but 30000 Acres of Land inhabited, so were their Clergy much fewer, and yet their Tithes very near double to ours. Thus when this Law and Distribution was first made, all the Males among the Levites, reckoning even from a month old, were but twenty and two thousand, Numb. 3. 39. And all that were of Age, and in Office consequently much less, only eight thousand and odd, Numb. 4. 48. But here in England, as the Contempt of the Clergy some years since affirm'd, (and why shou'd he not be believ'd in this case, when all is Gospel that he writes against 'em?) that in the year 70, their number was thirty thousand, which as he guess'd, might be advanc'd at least a third part from that time, to the writing of his Book. Supposing then every Clergyman has but two Children, one with another, (which is very reasonable, considering they are generally none of the worst Breeders) and the number amounts, according to the Levites reckoning, to six-score thousand. It may be said, the Levites encreas'd more,



more afterwards, which is certain enough, but neither then were they near the Number of our Christian Clergy, Josephus giving 'em in at 20000, in his Book against Appion, not above half as many as ours in England — But further to prove this *Quota* not merely Ceremonial, 'tis plain from Scripture that 'twas pay'd before the Law, by Abraham to Melchizedeck, the Priest of the most high God, and that not of the Spoils, as some pretend, for he swears he'd not touch any thing of it, but of all — all his possessions, as Jacob afterwards did, as soon as God had bless'd him, and given him any thing to give — Nor does it follow this was not his Duty, because he vow'd to do it, any more than that he was left at his Liberty whether he wou'd serve God or no, because he Vow'd if he return'd in safety, the Lord should be his God.

Further, that the *Jews* either receiv'd this Custom from their Ancestors, or that 'twas practis'd among the Heathen as well as them, we learn from the old Histories and old Monuments of Tyre, where not only the Souldiers but the Merchants very anciently pay'd Tythes of their Profits — see the same thing prov'd at large, and we think unanswerably, by Dr. Comber, of other Nations, where he takes Care of all the Objections brought to the contrary — and if we are not mistaken, says enough to satisfy any Man whom Interest has not blinded.

The second Question is — Whether any Body of Men have power to part with this right, without a just and valuable Compensation? We wou'd not come within the purview of a *Præmunire*, and therefore don't propose the Question t'other way — Whether any have power to take it; and besides 'twill be a clear Case it self, if God has reserv'd it to himself, and given it to them, and 'tis not even in their own power to part with't: Which that it is not, will be plain, if it be not in any Person's Power to divest his Successor of a natural right — which it cannot be, if what's natural be unalienable, and if that be not, certainly nothing is. Now if any Compensation were given, where or what is't? a Question we believe the wisest Lawyer in the Kingdom can't so easily Answer, as we can point at many Estates made up of nothing else but the Spoils of the Altar, not Abbots, but Parsons Lands, or at least their undoubted dues, that being too sweet a piece of Popery to be parted with at the Reformation.

Quest. 2. Whether is most for the Benefit of the Church and State, the Payment of Tythes in kind or by Composition?

Ans. We can't see how the State can be affected with it one way or other, unless collaterally or accidentally, by the disturbance of its Peace, or the like — But this we are certain, as far as our Observation has reach'd, that 'twou'd be vastly more for the Benefit of the Church, if Clergy-men took all their Tythe in kind; not only as to their own particular gain and advantage, but as to the Church in general, since they wou'd thereby not only prevent the abominable Cheats which are so commonly put upon 'em when they let it to others, but wou'd likewise preserve the Custom of Tithing, which is now all the right that's allow'd 'em — Whereas on the other side, there are very few Compositions of this Nature where they have any other Choice — but — take this or nothing.

Quest. 3. Whether a Clerk been't guilty of Simony, who accepts a Living on the Terms of a Bond of Resignation?

Ans. It must be sometimes our turn to ask idle Questions, as well as answer 'em — Wee'd therefore at present propose this to the World — Whether a Patron been't guilty of Knavery, who will let a Clerk starve by him, rather than part with a Living without such a Bond of resignation, which he hampers poor Genus and Species with, on purpose to lug in some pretty parcel of Glebe that lyes convenient — or perhaps to do him the Favour, to do him the Honour, to bestow a small piece of his crackt Kindred upon him together with his Benefice, or may be to reserve it for a Duncel of (perhaps) his Worship's own begetting? Sir S. D. tells us No, 'tis neither Simony nor Knavery, and he's of the strongest side, for he has the Law with him in several adjudg'd Cases. Be it one or t'other, 'tis like to continue and encrease, and

we doubt in time creep through most of the Benefices in England which are in private hands, tho' there are some brave Souls still left, who show they love Liberty themselves by scorning in so base a way to enslave those whom perhaps nothing but Fortune hinders from being at least their Equals. This Custom the Author of *Pluralities*, &c. takes Notice of, and Complains that 'twill in time unavoidably ruine the Clergy — as if any doubted it — Alas, they are too rich and sawcy — Ten Pound a Year and a Pudding is too high-feeding — When they are a little lower, they come to part with t'other Parcel of Glebe, or take less than half its worth for the Tithes-Corn, which is not yet made Tithes-free in his Worship's Manner.

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L O N D O N, Printed for John Dunton at the Raven in the Poultry, 1692.